

Lessons From New Orleans

By Pastor Kelly Sensenig

This past week we have witnessed the largest natural disaster that has ever hit the United States of America. Hurricane Katrina washed ashore in the South and broke the levy system designed to protect New Orleans, which sits 15 feet below sea level. As a result the entire city was basically destroyed by water and thousands lost their lives. The physical devastation, the human loss of life, and the physical aftermath of this tragic event will make this the most costly and catastrophic natural disaster to ever hit the shores of the United States of America. Added to the woes of the remaining people in New Orleans (who we pity and pray for) are the thugs and ruthless people who are looting, raping, and killing innocent lives. There are gangs and armed bandits who are trying to destroy anything that is left of the lives of these people.

This terrible tragedy weighs heavily upon the hearts of the nation at this time. This is why we need to address it and deal with it in today's message as we did the events of 911. There is too much heartache, misery, and woe associated with this catastrophe to just let this pass by without some kind of spiritual address. Such an event as this effects all of us in many ways – spiritually, physical, and monetarily. But what are the lessons we can learn from this tragic event in New Orleans? What can be said about New Orleans that will bring everything into perspective and help us to deal with this national disaster?

There are six lessons related to the New Orleans disaster.

1. God wants us to show compassion toward hurting people.

Galatians 6:9-10

“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”

1 Timothy 6:18 says:

“That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.”

Titus 3:8

“*This is* a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.”

1 John 3:17-18

“But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels *of compassion* from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”

The message of Christianity is one of reaching out to those who are hurting and in need. We do this with physical and spiritual help. Both are needed. *Sometimes we can only get to a man's soul through his belly!* Don't misunderstand me. I'm not referring to the social gospel for the liberal social gospel neglects to witness to people about Jesus Christ and their need for salvation through Christ (Acts 4:12). But as true believers we can help people physically and spiritually at the same time. We can feed them the earthly manna and the spiritual manna that is from Heaven at the same time. While Jesus was here on earth He set the example of demonstrating genuine compassion and love for people. As Christians we have a responsibility to assist the hurting. When we turn our eyes away from people we are not being Christlike or Christian.

The news media was interviewing a Christian man who was opening up his home, which he was intending to sell, to a refugee family to live. He decided to not sell his home until the family was back on their feet. His testimony was good for he said “God had given him these things and blessed him so that he can in return help people with them.” *Living out our Christian life is all about helping people to cope with life.* This is true from a physical and spiritual perspective and many times the physical opens up the door for the spiritual. When we reach out and help people from a physical standpoint we many times have opportunity to have a spiritual impact and witness in their lives.

We need to help and pray for the people of New Orleans. We need to be compassionate and express our Christian outreach to them in any way we can. What have you done to assist these people? To ignore these hurting people is not something Jesus would do if He were here. Mark 6:34, “And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.”

This was seen on a church sign. The sign sent some confusion to others. It read:

We Care About You
Sundays 10 a.m. Only

2. God promised to never destroy the earth by water.

Although a great flood destroyed the city of New Orleans the incident reminds us of something that God promised many centuries ago. He promised to never destroy the entire earth again by water. This truth can be seen in 2 Peter 3:1-13.

a. The scoffers predicted in the last days – 1-4

2 Peter 3:1-4

“This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in *both* which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation.”

b. The sent judgment of the past days – 5-6

2 Peter 3:5-6

“For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in

the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.”

Peter reminds us that the entire pre-Noahic world perished in the global waters of the flood (except Noah’s family). The perishing of thousands of people in the Tsunami and New Orleans disaster is but a faint reminder of the global loss of life that occurred due to the Genesis Flood. Man today forgets that God judged the world that once existed on planet earth with a global flood (deluge). But the Bible teaches that God will never again destroy the entire planet with water.

Genesis 9:8-16

“And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; And with every living creature that *is* with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, This *is* the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that *is* with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which *is* between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that *is* upon the earth.”

Not long ago I was running around a track to get some exercise. It was raining and the sun was trying to come through the clouds at the same time. Suddenly there appeared a beautiful rainbow over the track. It stayed there for the better part of ten minutes. I was literally running under the rainbow. The Bible teaches that God sends the rainbow with its beautiful prism of colors as a constant reminder that He will never again destroy the world by water. Although many people perished in the flood of New Orleans God has promised that

He will never destroy the entire population of the earth by a universal flood. This is one truth and lesson we must reflect upon in view of the flooding disaster of New Orleans. Peter actually says that God will someday destroy the world by fire – not water.

c. The total destruction of the future day – 7-10

2 Peter 3:7-10

“But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”

d. The triumph of the eternal day - 11 -13

2 Peter 3:11-13

“*Seeing* then *that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

Holiness of living not only causes God’s people to look forward to eternity (“looking for” – 2 Pet. 3:12) with expectation and anticipation but also to speed forth the commencement of eternity (“hasting” – to speed forth). How do believers hasten the coming of eternity or “the day of God” when the earth is going to be judged and the eternal state begin? How do we help eternity to get here faster? It’s through godly living (2 Pet. 3:11). The godly lives of the Lord’s people, through praying and witnessing, helps bring others to repentance and fulfill God’s earthly purposes, so that the great eternal day is one day

closer. We can speed forth (“hasting”) or accelerate this final drama. This is another incentive to live holy and serve the Lord. Amazing! Peter then repeats for emphasis the fact that the beginning of eternity (here called the day of God) will be preceded by the destruction of the heavens (comments on vs. 10) so that a new heaven can be created. This old world is going to be destroyed and a new earth and heaven is going to emerge into the great eternal day!

There are several lessons that we learn from the New Orleans disaster. Let’s go on in our study.

3. God is in control of the weather.

Mother Nature or Old Man Winter are humanistic filler terms that are used by the media today to override God and His sovereign working with the weather patterns of this world. I get sick and tired of man looking past God and renaming Him as Mother Nature, Father Time, and Old Man Winter. Man in his devilish and humanistic attempt to take God out of everything (school, our children, government, and from the public eye) speaks forth the repeated blasphemous blunders that nature is some kind of natural disaster that does not involve God. But one thing is for sure. God is in control of the weather. God was in control of steering the pattern of Hurricane Katrina and where it made landfall. If He was not in control of this hurricane then He is not God.

a. The whirlwind of judgment – 1-6

Nahum 1:1-6

“The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. God *is* jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and *is* furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth *wrath* for his enemies. The LORD *is* slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit *the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm*, and the clouds *are* the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his

anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him.”

These verses speak of the whirlwind of God’s judgment for the section of Scripture ends with these solemn words, “Who can stand before his indignation? And who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?” This passage of Scripture reminds us that God is in control of the weather patterns of this world and His judgment is compared to a tornado, hurricane, or whirlwind. The Lord God surely does have His way in the whirlwind. God serves His purpose by sending the whirlwind on its intended course or path. He knows how to steer the great masses of wind and He directs them in the path that He chooses. Think of this. God could have spared New Orleans but He chose to bring Hurricane Katrina into the New Orleans area and break the barriers that kept the city safe. God was certainly behind this whirlwind in every way and He was sending a message to the people of New Orleans. It was a message of judgment and their need to repent and get right before God.

b. The watery judgment – 1:8; 2:6

Nahum 1:8

“But with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies.”

Nahum 2:6

“The gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved.”

Although the Ninevites had repented under Jonah’s preaching, the city had gone into iniquity again, and therefore would not escape His wrath. His wrath would come upon them and 100 years after this prophecy Nineveh would be destroyed from the face of the earth. The Assyrian and Babylonian records are silent with regard to the fall of the city, but many historians all speak of it. There is a legend that the city could not be taken until the river became its enemy. The Scythians besieged it but could not make any impression on it for two years. In the third year, however, the river (according to Commander Jones, not the Tigris, but the Khosr), being swollen by rains, and very rapid in its current, carried away a portion of the wall, and by this

opening the besiegers gained an entrance. The king, recognizing in this the fulfillment of the oracle, gathered together his concubines and eunuchs, and, mounting a funeral pyre which he had caused to be constructed, perished in the flames. This catastrophe is supposed to be referred to in Nahum 1:8 and 2:6. God knows how to judge a city by way of flood waters.

The theme of this book of Nahum is the holiness of Jehovah, which must deal with sin in judgment.

Nahum 1:6

“Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him.”

Many have asked if the hurricane (whirlwind) is a sign of God’s judgment upon New Orleans? The fact of the matter is this. God does judge wickedness. America does not want to face up to this. New Orleans was a wicked city known for its sinful degradation. It would not be beyond God to send judgment on a city such as this as He did to Nineveh. Americans need to read their Bible and understand that God is a God of judgment and that He has judged multitudes of cities in the past and He will do the same thing today and in the future.

We are truly broken-hearted over the loss of life and the suffering of these people but this should not overshadow the truth that God is a God of judgment. America needs to get her head out of the sand and realize *who* God is and *what* He is all about. He is a holy God that does not allow sin to go unchecked forever. I don’t care what the modernized media says or what Bill O’Reilly believes. God does judge cities and people! If these news reporters would read their Bible they would see that God is a God of judgment.

4. Foxhole praying is never genuine.

Some Americans are quick to remember God during times of tragedy. They go to church and say little prayers for those who are suffering. But all of this is a facade. I call it foxhole religion. The soldiers used to say that they “got religion” when sitting in the foxholes as they waited to fight the enemy. The problem is this. After the war they were back

living the way they always lived and were forgetting God and their accountability to Him. Many people today seem to take on a religious front in times of chaos and calamity but this is not a true conversion experience to Jesus Christ. Has America changed spiritually because of 911? Not one iota. We are just as sinful a nation as we were before 911 and we are probably worse as we witness the degradation of our society. The foxhole religion of America is all a put-on that has not meaning to God. God does not put up with superficial spirituality that lacks genuineness. This can be seen in Isaiah 1:4-20.

1. Spiritual infection – 4-6

Isaiah 1:4-6

“Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head *there is* no soundness in it; *but* wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.”

Although this is describing the nation in Isaiah’s day it’s also an accurate description of modern-day America. America is a “sinful nation” and “people laden with iniquity.” Our nation today is sick from the sole of her foot to the crown of her head (“the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint”). America has spiritual infection and sickness (“wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores”) that needs to be healed. This can only come through repentance toward God and receiving His forgiveness.

2. Spiritual judgment – 7-10

Isaiah 1:7-10

“Your country *is* desolate, your cities *are* burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and *it is* desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, *and* we should have been like unto

Gomorrah. Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.

These verses teach that God brought judgment against His people. This is expressed in the words “your cities are burned with fire” and “the besieged city” (vs. 8). If God had not decided to leave a remnant of Jews the people would have been totally annihilated like Sodom and Gomorrah. God likens them to the “people of Gomorrah” in view of their spiritual departure from Him. What a description and application this has to the United States of America. Our nation is like Gomorrah and we can be sure that God is moving in judgment today.

3. Spiritual shallowness – 11-15

Isaiah 1:11-15

“To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; *it is* iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear *them*. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.”

Here is where foxhole religion comes into play. The people were practicing hypocritical acts of worship. They were going through the motions of church but because of their sinful hearts and lives God says their meetings were “iniquity, even the solemn meeting.” Their religious actions were superficial and had no genuineness attached to them. God also says, “I am weary to bear them” (their times of worship) and “I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear.” This shows God’s view and sore displeasure of hypocritical worship. America today wants to cry to God during times of tragedy and she wants to try and impress God with outward religious acts but none of them have meaning to God. God says He does not hear America cry to Him when she wants to continue to sin and live independent of His ways. God says that He is

weary of such foxhole religion. God is looking for true spirituality and repentance instead of superficial and meaningless worship.

America wants her sin and wants to play with spirituality at the same time but God says, "I'll have none of it." Sin and spirituality do not work together. When a nation wants to live in sin and pray to God at the same time, or act spiritual toward God in times of crisis, the holy God of Heaven repudiates them and their *superficial* and *shallow* actions. He is weary with American cries and prayers. He does not want to hear them and He does not hear them. God will only hear Americans when they start repenting of their sins and seeking His salvation and a right relationship with Him. We want to cry for God's help in national crisis but we don't want to cry in repentance to Him.

4. Spiritual transformation – 16-20

Isaiah 1:16-19

"Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land."

This is what America needs to do today. She needs to get on her knees and reason with God and get on His side. She needs to confess her horrible atrocities before God and ask for His forgiveness. This is God's invitation to a wayward people and to America today. America needs to turn from her sin and receive God's forgiveness! This is the message of Nahum. It's a message for every American and America in general. God says the nation must be "willing and obedient." So far it seems that we are not. We have not shown to God in spite of all of His recent judgments that we are going to turn away from our sins and seek to put God first in this country.

5. The Tribulation Period will be a horrible time to live upon earth.

When looking at the pictures of New Orleans and what is happening down South with the devastation, destruction, along with the gas

shortages, and how one large catastrophe affects the entire United States, one can get an *eerie foreshadowing* of what it's going to be like during the seven-year Tribulation Period.

Jesus said in Luke 21:23-26:

“But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.”

There are several characteristics of the Tribulation Period mentioned here. These are signs that will precede the Son's return to planet earth. We see them even today in this world. They are precursor signs to what is going to take place during the coming seven-years of judgment upon planet earth.

1. Judgment signs – vs. 25, 26b

a. astronomical signs of judgment (vs. 25) – the heavenly bodies will be darkened due to the great debris and smoke and dust storms generated by earthquakes (Acts 2:19-20). The heavens will quake (vs. 26b – “the power of the heavens shall be shaken”) sending meteorite showers to earth (heavenly earthquake) – see Matthew 24:29

b. earthly signs of judgment - earthquakes that effect the oceans – “sea and the waves roaring” (25b) – the greatest Tsunami is yet to come!

2. Distressful times – vs. 25 – “and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity.”

The judgment of the future will result times of distress and difficulty. We see this precursor sign even today. Look at the distress that takes

place when a national disaster occurs. There is nothing but chaos, perplexity, and distress among the lives of people.

3. Fearful lives – vs. 26 (“men’s hearts failing them for fear”) as they see and witness God’s judgment upon the earth.

During the Tribulation Period God is going to be moving in judgment upon this planet. Sin does not go unchecked forever. Today we see the prelude to this time of judgment. During the Tribulation Period God’s judgment is going to be intensified.

Jesus said in Matthew 24:21-22

“For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.”

This world is headed toward days of absolute horror, human upheaval, and horrendous (dreadful) judgment. God is holy and He will judge sin and sinners (Revelation 3:10; Isa. 26:21; Jeremiah 25:33-33).

Someone said: “Everything is fitting into the sockets of Bible prophecy. The world is moving toward its destiny!”

As I contemplate what the prophecies say about the judgment of this world and view what is taking place today it sends a cold chill up my back. Imagine what the judgment will be like during the coming Tribulation Period! In one day an entire city can be taken out and utter chaos abound. What will it be like throughout the seven-year period when God is sending judgment upon this earth time and time again? This world will be an awful place to live and no one will be safe. It will be a time of utter chaos, confusion, and when countless millions lose their lives. The world is on a rollercoaster ride and it’s headed toward total judgment and destruction. Because of this it behooves us to become a better witness for Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:20 says, “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

6. Man's wickedness remains in check by law and order.

It's interesting to see how terrible unlawful acts occur when there is no law and order in a city. This is witnessed in New Orleans. This reminds us that any government is better than no government. When there is no government that keeps order and peace the wickedness of men's hearts surfaces. This can be illustrated in the actions of mankind after the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ on earth. After 1,000 years of peace, when Jesus Christ will rule with a rod of iron and keep humanity in check, Satan will be loosed for a little season and lead mankind into rebellion against God.

Revelation 20:7-9

“And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom *is* as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.”

This prophetic event is similar to what New Orleans has already experienced. When lost mankind no longer has any reigns of government over his head he breaks forth in immediate rebellion against God. *When the reigns of righteous and moral government are lifted from a society terrible and evil acts immediately escalate and increase.* They spiral out of proportion at alarming rates. This shows the evil and rebellious hearts of lost humanity without God. It also tells us what it's going to be like during the Tribulation Period as the government loses power over the lives of people due to judgment and wreckage.

Let me conclude these lessons on New Orleans by saying several things. First, I'm glad to hear how the troops came into New Orleans to restore order and safety. They need to put a barrel down the nose of those who are committing these sinful crimes among humanity. God has established government to overthrow and punish evildoers (Romans 13:1-4).

A Quaker once said to a burglar: "Friend, I would do thee no harm for the world, but thou standest where I am about to shoot."

Second, we must remember that someday all of the cities of planet earth are going to be destroyed. This will occur at the end of the Tribulation Period. New Orleans will go down again!

Revelation 16:18-19 says:

"And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, *and* so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and **the cities of the nations fell**: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath."

During this time of coming tribulation all the cities of earth will be destroyed since all cities are a focal point of rebellion against God. This has been true since the days of Cain and the first city (Gen. 4:17).

Third, I'm glad that I'm saved! I'm glad I am not going to face the most terrible time of judgment that this world has yet to see. Jesus is going to take me out of this world and into the next world (Heaven) before He unleashes the worst judgment that this world has ever witnessed! This is called the "day of the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 5:2) or the seven-year period of time on God's prophetic timetable when He is moving in continual judgment. Here is the promise of the believer's deliverance from this dreadful time.

Revelation 3:10

"Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."

1 Thessalonians 5:4

"But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief."

1 Thessalonians 5:9

“For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.”

God’s children are promised rapture instead of wrath and release instead of the Great Tribulation judgments. The church is going to be “caught up” (1 Thess. 4:17) and return with the Lord to Heaven (John 14:1-3) before the Tribulation Period begins. The words to the old song are true, “I’ll fly away to glory.”